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Ward, George B. Papers, 1859-1974

Background:

While legend and some historical sources identify George Ward as the first male child born in the city of Birmingham, he was actually born in Georgia on March 1, 1867 (four years before the founding of Birmingham). When Ward was four years old his family moved to Birmingham where his parents and grandfather operated the city's first hotel, the Relay House. Ward attended public school and then worked for the First National Bank. In 1899 he was elected to the Birmingham Board of Aldermen. Ward was elected mayor in 1904 and reelected in 1907. He lost a 1910 campaign for sheriff of Jefferson County but was elected president of the Birmingham City Commission in 1913. After losing his bid for reelection in 1917 to a candidate whose "True American" platform appealed to anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic elements of the electorate, Ward retired from politics. In 1925 he built a new home on Shades Mountain overlooking Birmingham. Called "Vestavia", Ward's house was modeled on the Roman Temple of the Vestal Virgins. The house was surrounded by elaborate gardens, doghouses shaped like Roman temples, and ponds on which Ward floated models of Roman ships. On special occasions Ward opened the property for public tours, and he hosted parties featuring guests in togas, barefoot dancing maidens, and servants dressed as Roman soldiers.

Ward died in 1940, and Vestavia was demolished in 1971 to make way for a new Vestavia Hills Baptist Church sanctuary.

George Ward is best remembered as the eccentric builder of Vestavia, but he was also a progressive urban reformer who as mayor oversaw the construction of libraries, playgrounds, parks, and community centers. He also improved government services to Birmingham's African American community.

Scope and Content:

The George B. Ward papers contain correspondence, reports, and other material documenting Ward's service as president of the Birmingham City Commission and material relating to Ward's unsuccessful campaign for reelection in 1917. The papers also include biographical information on Ward, files on subjects of interest to him including music, flowers, birds, and local history, and a small body of correspondence from *Gone with the Wind* author Margaret Mitchell. A 24-volume set of scrapbooks contains newspaper clippings relating to Ward's career, Birmingham history, and politics. A separate index to the scrapbooks is available in the Archives.

Subject Areas:

Birmingham (Ala.) – City Commission.
Birmingham (Ala.) – Officials and employees.
Birmingham (Ala.) – Politics and government.
Mayors – Alabama – Birmingham.
Mitchell, Margaret, 1900-1949 – Correspondence.
Vestavia (Birmingham, Ala.)

Size: 6 linear feet (3 boxes) plus 24 scrapbooks

Source: Birmingham Public Library, Southern History Department

Restrictions: Standard preservation and copyright restrictions.

Guide Prepared by: Camille Agricola (1976; revised 2003 by Gigi Gowdy and Jim Baggett)

File Number:	Description:
	Correspondence
12.1.1	General, December 7, 1927 to July 11, 1934 (28 pages).
12.1.2	General, January 3 to December 27, 1935 (51 pages).
12.1.3	General, January 9, 1936 to March 26, 1940 and undated (102 pages).
12.1.4	Margaret Mitchell Marsh, September 1 to December 6, 1939 (10 pages).
	Politics
12.1.5	Term as Mayor, Birmingham, Alabama, January 25, 1908 to March 29, 1910 (15 pages).
12.1.6	Term as President of City Commission, November 16, 1913 to January 1917 and undated (133 pages).
	Term as President of City Commission, Annual Reports 1914 to 1915

- 12.1.7 Anti-Tuberculosis Association of Jefferson County, October 6, 1914 (4 pages).
- 12.1.8 ARC Light Inspector, September 19 to October 15, 1914 (6 pages).
- 12.1.9 Building Inspector, September 8, 1914 to September 30, 1915 (8 pages).
- 12.1.10 City Attorney, September 17 to October 4, 1915 (8 pages).
- 12.1.11 City Engineer, September 11, 1914 to September 25, 1915 (8 pages).
- 12.1.12 City Electricians. September 30, 1914 (5 pages).
- 12.1.13 Comptroller's Department, September 30, 1914 (1 page).
- 12.1.14 Fire Department, September 30, 1914 to September 30, 1915 (94 pages).
- 12.1.15 Health Department, September 9, 1914 to October 19, 1915 (45 pages).
- 12.1.16 License Collector, September 9, 1914 to October 1915 (6 pages).
- 12.1.17 North Birmingham Water and Light Plant, September 20-22, 1914 (16 pages).
- 12.1.18 Plumbing Inspector, September 30, 1913 to September 30, 1915 (12 pages).
- 12.1.19 Police Department, September 16-30, 1914 (10 pages).
- 12.1.20 Pound Keeper, September 9, 1914 to September 30, 1915 (16 pages).
- 12.1.21 Public Library, September 11, 1914 to September 30, 1915 (117 pages).
- 12.1.22 Purchasing Agent, September 30, 1914 to October 20, 1915 (20 pages).
- 12.1.23 Smoke Inspector, September 18 to October 1, 1914 (38 pages).

12.1.24 Street Commissioner, September 24, 1914 to October 13, 1915 (36 pages).

Campaign of 1917

12.1.25 George Ward Campaign Literature, June 28 to September 18, 1917 and undated (100 pages).

12.1.26 Dr. N.A. Barrett Campaign Literature, September 28, 1917 and undated (5 pages).

12.1.27 General Campaign Literature, June 10, 1916 and October 8, 1917 (3 pages).

12.1.28 George Ward Rallies, September 6-16, 1917 and undated (14 pages).

12.1.29 Dr. N.A. Barrett Rallies, August 31 to September 15, 1917 and undated (28 pages).

12.1.30 George Ward Issues, September 1 to October 2, 1917 and undated (50 pages).

12.1.31 Dr. N.A. Barrett Issues, September 9-21, 1917 and undated (35 pages).

12.1.32 Post Political Career, October 17, 1927 to July 5, 1938 and undated (32 pages).

Biography

12.2.1 Unpublished Work, D.B. Grace, *Official Life of George B. Ward* (housed in Tutwiler Collection under Biography, George Ward) (1 page).

12.2.2 Published Work, Edward S. LaMonte, *George B. Ward: Birmingham's Urban Statesman*, July 1974 (29 pages).

12.2.3 Published Accounts of Death and Memorials, September 11, 1940 to November 26, 1951 and undated (18 pages).

Personal Interest

12.2.4 Vestavia, November 28, 1926 to May 1971 (35 pages).

- 12.2.5 Family, April 13, 1935 to February 17, 1940 and undated (81 pages).
- 12.2.6 Writing, December 8, 1934 to August 1, 1937 (3 pages).
- 12.2.7 Music, March 28, 1930 to February 2, 1939 and undated (15 pages).
- 12.2.8 Flowers, May 13, 1931 to August 22, 1939 and undated (43 pages).
- 12.2.9 Birds, December 5, 1930 to May 17, 1939 (18 pages).
- 12.2.10 Early Birmingham, December 19, 1932 to March 13, 1939 (17 pages).

Scrapbooks

- 12.3.1 Volume 1, June 1899 to April 13, 1900.
- 12.4.1 Volume 2, May 3, 1900 to August 8, 1901.
- 12.5.1 Volume 3, August 20, 1901 to April 2, 1903.
- 12.6.1 Volume 4, February 19, 1904 to August 1, 1905.
- 12.7.1 Volume 5, August 2, 1905 to November 11, 1906.
- 12.8.1 Volume 6, November 8, 1906 to October 13, 1907.
- 12.9.1 Volume 7, October 13, 1907 to June 24, 1908.
- 12.10.1 Volume 8, June 24, 1908 to March 3, 1909.
- 12.11.1 Volume 9, September 1909 to October 6, 1910.
- 12.12.1 Volume 10, March 24, 1911 to September 21, 1913.
- 12.13.1 Volume 11, March 15, 1913 to January 18, 1915.
- 12.14.1 Volume 12, January 1914 to May 19, 1917.
- 12.15.1 Volume 13, January 19, 1915 to December 6, 1916.
- 12.16.1 Volume 14, December 7, 1915 to May 23, 1917.

- 12.17.1 Volume 15, May 23 to November 14, 1917.
- 12.18.1 Volume 16, 1870 to 1940.
- 12.19.1 Volume 17, February 9, 1930 to April 19, 1932.
- 12.20.1 Volume 18, December 19, 1932 to July 22, 1934.
- 12.21.1 Volume 19, August 6 to November 25, 1935.
- 12.22.1 Volume 20, May 18, 1937 to April 23, 1939.
- 12.23.1 Volume 21, January 12, 1859 to April 24, 1939.
- 12.24.1 Volume 22, July 1892 to April 1893.
- 12.25.1 Volume 23, May 28, 1939 to May 19, 1941.
- 12.26.1 Volume 24, 1935 to 1936.